

Good evening, everyone. My name is Fresia Morales and I'm a senior studying Material Science and Engineering at the University of Connecticut. I am here to speak on behalf of the regional campus students at the University.

As a first-generation student and an immigrant, going to college was something both my parents and I always aspired to. I have witnessed my parents working long days, in order for me to be successful and achieve that goal. We knew that it would be challenging because I would be the first person in my family to attend college. With language being another barrier to overcome, we were blind going into the college admission process.

Doing well in school has always been important to my family. So I was used to pushing myself and working hard. However, college was a completely different beast and an uncharted territory for us. Now I had to worry about not only academics, but also financial aid and getting to know the faculty, and staff, who proved to be an essential part of my success throughout my years at UConn.

I was lucky enough to be chosen to be part of the Student Support Services, a program designed to help first generation, low-income students. My acceptance to UConn was contingent on my successful completion of a rigorous 6-week summer program prior to my freshmen year, which helped prepare me for what was to come. My learning curve was steep and typical of a first generation college student. I didn't know what was expected of me academically. The SSS counselors have been a key element in my college success. They helped and supported me throughout my college journey and provided me with incredible guidance when applying to the school of engineering, and with the readmission process after taking a year off to join the military.

As a peer mentor for Student Support Services, I've seen the program grow each year. The proposed budget cuts will have a direct impact on students, particularly those who benefit from the additional support that programs like SSS have to offer. It is critical that students with similar backgrounds to mine continue to have access to higher education. It's been demonstrated that low income and first generation students who don't have exposure to higher education and lack academic support, are less likely to achieve their full potential when pursuing a college degree.

I know these budget cuts may not seem significant, but it will directly affect programs, which are designed for students who need additional support. If it were not for the opportunities that UConn and SSS provided to me, my story would have ended differently. Like my parents, I would have to work long days to meet the needs of my family. This would lead to an endless cycle of poverty, in which students like me find themselves trapped and hopeless.

UConn has committed itself to "help every student grow intellectually and become a contributing member of the state, national, and world communities." Without the proper funding UConn will not be able to uphold its mission. I chose UConn because it had everything I was looking for in a university such as high academic standards and affordability. I'm ecstatic I'll be graduating in May. I hope future students will have the opportunity to benefit from all of the support that was available to me. I truly wish that my words, as well as the impact that UConn has made in the community will persuade you to reconsider the budget cuts.

Thank you, committee members, for holding this hearing and allowing me to speak today. Thank you to the General Assembly for your continued support and thank you to everyone for listening to me today.